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AUTHOR Rosenqvist, Jerry; Vallberg, Ann-Christine
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ABSTRACT

The newsletter issue presents the results of a project that examined: (1) teaching at the senior level of schools for the mentally retarded in Sweden; (2) teachers' and supervisors' views of the pupils; and (3) the reality of the open labor market. The project analyzed mechanisms in and outside teaching that prevent or impede access to the labor market by former pupils of schools for the mentally retarded. The study involved 103 students in grades 7 through 10, 12 class teachers, 11 vocational guidance teachers, 10 representatives of working life, and 2 parents. The study found that the schools' written curriculum was a well-intentioned document with many practical instructions for the planning of teaching. However, teachers in some quarters made very little use of it in lesson planning. Teachers and representatives of working life regarded pupils as conscientious in terms of punctuality, careful and sustained work, and attendance, with shortcomings in the areas of flexibility and initiative. Most of the class teachers taught their pupils with enthusiasm and pleasure, but there were some who adopted a fairly repressive attitude. Vocational guidance teachers adopted a more dynamic approach in their professional practice than regular class teachers. Among numerous recommendations are the following: (1) early introduction to and instruction on conditions of working life; (2) recurrent in-service training especially for classroom teachers; (3) identify-supportive instruction for pupils and teacher training in such instruction, including ways to "stretch" pupils' capacities; (4) joint meetings of teachers and working life representatives at supervised work training places; and (5) active commitment by school management to staff welfare. Includes 14 references and a list of 22 project reports produced or in preparation. (JDD)

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SCHOOL RESEARCH NEWSLETTER

NOVEMBER 1989 FIELD-TOPIC 1989:9
Schools for the mentally retarded
and the labour market

Concluded project:

THE FUNCTION OF SCHOOLS FOR THE MENTALLY RETARDED IN A LABOUR MARKET PERSPECTIVE

A study of societal objectives and classroom reality

Only about 10-15 % of the pupils completing vocational study programmes in schools for the mentally retarded at the beginning of the 1980s were able to find non-subsidised employment in the open labour market.
What role does schools for the mentally retarded play with regard to the pupil´s prospects in life, and how do teachers and representatives of working life regard the pupils?
This issue of School Research Newsletter presents the results of a project, now concluded, aimed at augmenting links between teaching at the senior level of schools for the mentally retarded (including practical work experience), teachers´ and supervisors´ views of the pupils and the reality of the labour market in what is termed a micro-macro perspective, supported by qualitative method.

PROJECT CONDUCTED AT:
The Department of Educational and Psychological Research
University of Lund - Malmö School of Education
Box 235 01
S- 200 45 MALMÖ
Tel: 040 - 32 00 00

PROJECT LEADER:
Jerry Rosenqvist, Ph.D.

CO-RESEARCHER:
Ann-Christine Vallberg, B.A.

PROJECT NUMBER:
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Preface

It is not always very easy as an individual (and teacher) to open one's door or one's thoughts for inspection. But the people volunteering to take part in this study have done just that, and generously so. This shows that teachers too are eager to find out more about the teaching process in schools for the mentally retarded, that they appreciate that an observer has the opportunity to see and hear that much more than they themselves can, that an interviewer can penetrate beyond the concrete particulars in the answers given, and that this can shed light on their own professional activity. I hope that, in presenting them like this in writing, I have been able to do them justice.

The background to the study and a presentation of the project

The starting point and, accordingly, the problem addressed in the study presented here concerns the small chances of pupils in schools for the mentally retarded obtaining "ordinary" jobs in the open, regular labour market, even after completing a programme of vocational education. According to Gumaelius and Ling (1982) and Ling (1986), only 16% and 10% of the pupils competing a line of vocational schools for the mentally retarded in Sweden in 1980 and 1984 respectively had, one year later, found unsubsidised employment in the regular labour market. The problem, then, is in a general way bound up with the question of integration and with its antithesis, i.e. segregation tendencies in our society. One focus of the inquiry has been the extent to which teaching prepares pupils for integrated adult life. The planning underlying the project has been internally reported, e.g. by Rosenqvist (1984).

The overriding purpose of the project is to identify, describe and analyse mechanisms in and outside teaching which prevent or impede access by former pupils of schools for the mentally retarded to the labour market, and in this way to establish a scientific foundation for proposals concerning changes/improvements to instruction in these schools and recommendations to "the social partners", aimed at promoting full participation by these pupils in adult life, complete with employment. The main emphasis is on describing and explaining the function of schools for the mentally retarded, i.e.

1. their role in the social system and,
2. the view of human beings/pupils taken by staff, teaching staff especially, and their basic views of society and its functions at different levels, as well as possible manifestations of these views in the teaching process, and in addition
3. to relate these descriptions to open and concealed social mechanisms which may conceivably influence the interpretation of the value of work and, accordingly, mentally retarded persons' right of access to the labour market.

With the above outlined purpose in mind, the research project was planned as shown by the overview in Box 1.

Box 1. Concise plan for the project "The Function of Schools for the Mentally Retarded".

MICRO LEVEL - the teaching process in schools for the mentally retarded
A survey and scrutiny of the face of teaching in basic schools for the mentally retarded, both in the classroom and through the work of the vocational guidance teacher.

PARA LEVEL - interpretations of social structure and goal descriptions at various levels
An intermediary level, i.e. a description and scrutiny of the way in which teachers in basic schools for the mentally retarded, representatives of working life (in supervisory and instructional positions) and parents interpret the goals of society and school for activities with mentally retarded persons, as well as their views concerning work and the labour market for the mentally retarded.

MACRO LEVEL - social structure and goal descriptions
This entails a description, scrutiny and attempted explanation of structures in the market-economy social system, its ideological development and basis, its impact on views concerning the value of work and curricular codes, above all as regards the curriculum for schools for the mentally retarded (Lsä 73). This also includes an international comparison of education and working life for the mentally retarded, e.g. in West Germany, East Germany, Canada, the USA and Austria.

My reason for choosing basic schools for the mentally retarded is that the pupils there (at what is termed functional C level) are expected to be able to read, write and count with a proficiency more or less comparable to that of pupils in regular compulsory school (Lsä 73, pp. 10-12). In addition a large proportion of the pupils emerging from basic schools for the mentally retarded are expected to be capable of completing a course of vocational education (in vocational school for the mentally retarded) so as to qualify for the labour market (Op. cit. pp. 15-16). Within the various levels of basic schools for the mentally retarded, I have chosen

to investigate teaching at senior level, because the pupils there, mainly in grades 9 and 10, take work experience (prao) programmes.

In this study I try to perceive socially determined reasons for the relatively low employment participation rate of the mentally retarded. Thus I try to shift the perspective from the traditional psychological explanatory level to a more socially related, "interactionistic" level with regard to the concept of mental retardation and, especially, with reference to the situation of the mentally retarded in the labour market.

Within each level I have used various methods of data compilation. Thus at macro level I have mainly relied on my reading of what other authors have had to say. At para level I have worked almost exclusively with individual interviews, and at micro level I have used observations of the teaching process in the broad sense. This means that I have also observed teaching situations outside the classroom, as for example when vocational guidance teachers visit prao pupils at workplaces. Also at this level of investigation, vocational guidance teachers in schools for the mentally retarded have kept diaries for a total of two weeks, recording their everyday professional activity (see Rosenqvist, 1989, b).

Theoretical background

During the 1970s and 1980s, several Swedish sociological and educational writers have discussed and used analyses of teaching related to a macro system (Lundgren, 1979; Callewaert & Nilsson, 1979, 1980). This may concern the relation of schools to aspects of how the production and distribution of goods and services are organised, how power, knowledge and skills are distributed and organised, and how the economic, political and ideological organisations relate to one another. The theoretical background to such studies can be summarised in the words "a global theory of the internal work of school, school frames and the overriding social structure" (Callewaert & Nilsson, 1980, p. 9). In a critical perspective of this kind, an attempt is made to perceive the underlying causes of differences between school objectives and practice and in this way to "determine the limits to the scope for action available to the various social forces" (p. 78).

Sampling procedure

My benchmark for the survey was to reach about 10% of relevant groups of pupils (at the senior level of basic schools for the mentally retarded (grades 8-10), class teachers (at the senior level of basic schools for the mentally retarded) and vocational guidance teachers (in schools for the mentally retarded). To these are added the representatives of working life who were in touch with the pupils concerned during their work experience programmes. In Rosenqvist (1988 b, pp. 78-82) I have discussed at length my sampling procedure within this framework, and so on this occasion I will confine myself to a brief indication of the groups studied.

In the 1984/85 school year, schools for the mentally retarded in Sweden were divided into
- 70 school management districts in
- 26 county council areas or non-county-council cities.

The number of pupils enrolled in schools for the mentally retarded (both basic school and training school) was
- 12,759, of whom
- 4,011 were attending basic schools for the mentally retarded.

A theoretical calculation indicated the following national populations of relevance to the study:

no. pupils (grades 8-10)	1,200
no. classes (grades 8-10)	110
no. class teachers (full time)	110

The number of vocational guidance teachers could be more exactly determined as 76.

I was not aiming to find a representative sample, and so the sampling principles can if anything be termed "random", in the sense of practical considerations deciding the sampling areas (as a rule, county council areas in the south of Sweden). However, I wanted to obtain documentation from schools for the mentally retarded working under different conditions, and in this I succeeded.

With the impediments, reductions and additions stated here (and in Rosenqvist, 1988 b, pp. 78-82; 1988 a, pp. 19-26), the final survey population was that specified in Table 1, below.

Table 1. Final survey population for the project. Planned population in brackets.

6 county councils	(7)
9 school management districts	(11)
9 classes in grades 8-10	(11)
5 classes in grades 7-8	(-)
103 pupils in grades 7-10	(120)
12 class teachers, including two from grades 7-8	(12)
11 vocational guidance teachers	(10)
10 representatives of working life, including	(-)
6 executives and	(-)
4 supervisors	(-)
2 parents	(-)

Thus I was able to base my survey on a population quite closely resembling that originally planned. It should be added that I had planned for a certain non-response, because by knowledge of schools for the mentally retarded told me that certain impediments were liable to occur. It should also be pointed out that I asked vocational guidance teachers and/or class teachers to make sure that the pupils' parents, and the pupils themselves in the various classes, had no objections to my investigation.

There are good reasons - obvious, presumably, to most readers - for supposing that teachers in schools for the mentally retarded exert a special influence on their pupils in the process of transmission/reproduction which teaching implies. It may therefore be of some interest to study the opinions of certain basic social and educational mechanisms which are represented among teachers. In Rosenqvist (1988 b) I have presented a survey of this kind, concerning what Marton (1978) termed "a statement about people's conception of reality", as distinct from questions about actual causes, which lead to "a statement about reality" (p. 2). The study made it clear that teacher opinions with a bearing on the pupils' occupational future were extremely varied. Certain teachers, for example, found it "almost shameful" that so few of the pupils obtained jobs after school, while others felt it was natural that employers should hesitate to take on former pupils of schools for the mentally retarded.

Class teachers at the senior level of basic schools for the mentally retarded were included in the observation study, even in cases where they did not have any direct duties connected with the pupils' work experience (prao), i.e. as assistant vocational guidance teachers. This was my way

of emphasising my opinion that class teachers at the senior level of basic schoolsl for the mentally retarded, together with the vocational guidance teachers, are key figures in the process of educational and vocational choice. In Rosenqvist (1988 b) it has been shown that certain class teachers leave the entire question of work experience programmes to the vocational guidance teachers, while others are involved to an extent almost comparable with the vocational guidance teacher herself/himself. The curriculum gives fairly clear instructions regarding the participation of class teachers in the vocational choice process and the arrangement of a possible future job. The following excerpt comes under the heading "Pupil adjustment":

"This /possible emplöyment in the future/ means that mentally retarded persons who as adults will function at B and C levels need, while at school, to acquaint themselves with different workplaces which may come to be considered. Furthermore, the various school subjects should include items preparing the pupils for sheltered or semi-sheltered employment or for work in the open market." (Lsä 73, p. 16)

Next, here is what I consider a pivotal and challenging excerpt from the curriculum for schools for the mentally retarded, further underlining the role of the class teacher:

"In all subjects it is always possible to elucidate some aspect of education and working life." (Lsä 73, p. 31)

Principal results

The results I present here are concerned with the occurrence of phenomena, without any specification of the percentages of the survey population representing them. Thus the presentation of results should be taken as a description of "what exists", not of "how many are affected by what".

Macro level

The experience gained at macro level, mainly through studies of literature, has to a great extent been confirmed by direct observation and interview studies at para and micro levels. In the report "On employment" (Rosenqvist, 1989 a), I have described "the Swedish system" by scrutinising the way in which job opportunities arise, how this process is governed

and where the emphasis of the right of determination for working life is located. This has forced us to acknowledge that "wage earners" have very little influence on their own working situation, and also that "marginal groups" - such as the mentally retarded - are tending to become more marginal.

Since the possession of a job in a society like ours is looked on as the foundation of active participation in the life of the community generally, exclusion spells disaster for these "marginal" groups. The problem is especially accentuated in the case of former pupils of schools for the mentally retarded who have vocational qualifications and, as a rule, a very strong urge to get a "proper" job after leaving school, because, to young people like these with fairly strong self-awareness, this also means true integration with the community. This group of fellow human beings have always had difficulty in gaining access to the open labour market, but unfortunately the tendency seems to be for placements to diminish with every passing year. This is particularly true of completely unsubsidised jobs.

I have interpreted a development of this kind, in which employment seems to be more and more conditional on the State intervening with wage subsidies (grants covering 90% or 50% of wage costs), as meaning that the State thus intervenes to guarantee the employer sufficient profit. Teachers at schools for the mentally retarded wish to be accommodating towards employers who show any interest in recruitment in the first place, and they sometimes say "we must look after positive-minded employers", meaning that one should avoid asking too much of them in connection with the possible recruitment of an ex-pupil.

At macro level, studies of the curriculum for schools for the mentally retarded (Lsä 73, still in force) were also included, and I was able to establish that this curriculum was a well-intentioned document with many practical instructions for the planning of teaching, both on a general level and as regards elements of preparation for adult and working life. Elsewhere (Soder, 1981, pp. 32-33), Lsä 73 has been criticised in a comparative study which also includes Lgr 80. The comparative study showed that the introductory goal descriptions differed in such a way that the task of schools for the mentally retarded can be taken to imply

educating its pupils to be mentally retarded adults instead of promoting their integration with the community. I have been able to endorse this criticism, but I also see a solution to the problem through the formulations of a new draft curriculum for schools for the mentally retarded, circulated for comment by the NBE during 1989. The new draft makes the curriculum for schools for the mentally retarded practically identical with that of the ordinary compulsory school, with supplementary items added.

But although I thus approve on the whole of the way in which the curriculum has been written, I am apprehensive concerning the way in which it will be used, because in several places my study has revealed that teachers make very little use of it as a basis for planning their lessons. Teachers in some quarters have dismissed it as unrealistic and have said that they rely more on their own experience than on curricular directions. This brings us on to the next sub-study under the project: the para level.

Para level

Through interview analyses with class and vocational guidance teachers, representatives of working life (employers' representatives and work experience supervisors) and parents, it has been possible under this project to chart opinions among the interviewees concerning employment, schools for the mentally retarded and the pupils' occupational future.

This has revealed a discrepancy between opinions of the pupils' true capacity (for doing a normal job) and opinions of their right of also demanding access to a workplace in the regular labour market.

Generally speaking, both teachers and representatives of working life regard pupils from basic schools for the mentally retarded as conscientious in terms of punctuality, careful and sustained work and attendance. Most of the shortcomings referred to have related to their flexibility and powers of initiative.

In spite of this testimony, employers, and also certain class and vocational guidance teachers, take a negative view of employment in the

open labour market without wage subsidies. I have taken this to imply that they are speaking within their own sphere of interest and are indifferent to the pupils' true needs. It should be added that all supervisors at work experience places were in favour of recruitment without wage subsidies, and they believe that pupils had more than sufficient output capacity to cover their own wage costs.

A general analysis of the views taken by class and vocational guidance teachers of society and of people/the pupil showed the majority of vocational guidance teachers and some class teachers to have what I term a dynamic view of both society and people. Otherwise the majority of class teachers came in the "ambivalent/ambivalent" panel, in such a way that, in the interviews, they expressed both a dynamic and a somewhat static view of society and people. One or two teachers came in the "static/static" panel, which I have taken to mean that they felt themselves cast in a professional mould and were somewhat tired of working as teachers in schools for the mentally retarded (see Figure 1).

It should also be observed in this connection that having a static view of the pupil was taken as a manifestation of disbelief in the ability of pupils to achieve any further progress, the perception of a "ceiling" in their development and a feeling that there was no point in encouraging their educational activity any further. A dynamic view of the pupil implied an opposite view, i.e. the view that one should spare no effort in enabling the pupils to take another step forward in their development. Social view was made to characterise the confidence of the individual in his own capacity for exerting influence, or at least wishing to influence social development, e.g. as regards the ability of society to make better use of the resources which everybody has to offer.

Figure 1. Distribution of 23 complete interview replies between categories, with reference to views of society and of people/pupils. (Kl = class teachers; Yl = vocational guidance teachers).

VIEW OF PUPILS

VIEW OF SOCIETY	Dynamic	Ambivalent	Static
Dynamic	2 Kl 5 Yl		
Ambivalent	4 Kl	1 Kl 3 Yl	1 Yl
Static	1 Yl	4 Kl	1 Kl 1 YL

Micro level

Most of the class teachers teach their pupils with enthusiasm and pleasure, but there are those who adopt a fairly repressive attitude to their charges. This has emerged from the preliminary analyses of the classroom observations. (A report on this part of the survey will be completed in the Autumn of 1989.) The analyses can be summarised in a figure (2) divided into four panels, taking into account both the content of teaching and its approach to the pupils. In Figure 2, just as in Figure 1, one can also imagine centre panels containing parts of the extremes. (Distribution between the panels has not yet been fully processed.)

In some quarters, not least through the interview analyses, it has also been possible to discern a serious lack of commitment to the task of teaching. In teachers of this kind one also glimpses an inability to penetrate the pupils' situation and understand their individuality, a capacity which I believe is necessary to the teacher in a schools for the mentally retarded. I have interpreted some of these teachers as carriers of the tradition of "training for submission". Here again, it should be made clear that most of the teachers are committed to their work, even though their way of thinking can sometimes be characterised more by "charitable ideas" than by a progressive, socially conscious spirit.

Figure 2. Four possible combinations with reference to content and pupil approach in teaching

CONTENT	PUPIL APPROACH: Encouraging	PUPIL APPROACH: Restrained
Conscious Planned Holistic		
Unconscious Unplanned Fragmentary		

General

Although the final report on this project remains to be completed, I venture to draw the following more general conclusions from the study of the functioning of schools for the mentally retarded.

The results of the studies conducted confirm the necessity of a project design taking both macro and micro levels into account. Schools lead something of a life of their own, referred to by Lundgren (1983) as "the relative autonomy of school". At the same time they are dependent on the general life of the community at large (of which they form part). Teachers, teaching materials and other conditioning factors can be said to constitute a filter (para level) between social intentions and classroom reality. In this connection teachers are "only human", with the result that their own view of society frequently forms the basis of their professional teaching practice as well.

This "ballast", in its less progressive guise, is most conspicuous among class teachers in basic schools for the mentally retarded, while vocational guidance teachers often adopt a more dynamic approach in their professional practice. I have taken this as being due to people choosing to become vocational guidance teachers partly because they have a more palpable interest in social affairs. Class teachers tend more often to become the vehicles of traditions and seem more anxious for the pupils to acquire the best possible basic skills than for them to learn how to assert their rights as citizens. The "submission" mentioned above would

thus mean in this connection that class teachers are also more concerned with "training for the labour market" in a traditional sense, i.e. making the pupils docile and well-behaved. Vocational guidance teachers are also anxious for the pupils to be attractive to the labour market, but through their insight into current changes in the labour market they are also capable of perceiving the "new qualities" which are needed and of promoting such elements in the instruction they give their pupils prior to prao and work experience.

Recommendations

As a consequence of the inadequate knowledge possessed by class teachers of social and working life, but also as a means of reducing the feeling, experienced by certain class teachers, of working in isolation, I recommend recurrent in-service training for both class and vocational guidance teachers and for head teachers and invited representatives of working life. In-service training of this kind could deal with questions relating to basic conditions of production in the community, as well as questions concerning reproduction and qualification. Questions of these kinds would thus be tackled with reference to the participants' own experiences and with a view to action. The latter, could for example take the form of targets for a certain school management district to organise a certain number of workplaces in the open market within a given period of time. I would also like to see local politicians invited to in-service days of this kind, so that decisions could also be accepted and understood by funding agencies.

To overcome the phenomenon hinted at above, which might be termed an ossified professional role, I would like here to recommend profounder involvement on the part of school management in matters of staff welfare. Many school managements tend to live in progressively growing detachment from the practical realities of classroom and working life. Headships must not be allowed to become administrative bureaucracies. They must be awarded to staff with the ability and readiness to concern themselves with pure teaching matters. The post of head teacher must be looked on as a closely related advisory agency on educational and personnel-related matters.

As a summary of the measures recommended for promoting the full participation of pupils in social and working life, I would like to put forward the following points:

- Early introduction (at intermediate or perhaps already at junior level) with suitable instruction on conditions of working life and field trips to workplaces, quite possibly under a system of "host companies".
- In-service training for teachers, especially class teachers in schools for the mentally retarded, to deepen their knowledge of employment, the labour market, economic affairs and production aspects.
- Production of teaching material on aspects of working life.
- Identity-supportive instruction, to enable the pupils to build up an awareness of their strong and weak points.
- In-service training of teachers and other staff concerning the ways in which identity-supportive activities of this kind can be conducted.
- The inclusion of such in-service training of questions concerning ways of "stretching" the pupils' capacities and thus refusing to acknowledge any "ceilings".
- Integrated teaching, i.e. the holistic organisation of teaching so as to minimise planned (and above all unplanned) interruptions.
- Discussion of the need for new lines of study and a modernised "machine line-up" in connection with the renewal of teaching on the vocational side of schools for the mentally retarded.
- Responsibilities of the mandator in connection with pupils' entry into the employment sector. (So far, county councils have been very reluctant to take on ex-pupils as employees of their own.)
- Active staff welfare (commitment on the part of school management) and active discussion by teaching staff (so that teachers will not grow apathetic or get into a rut).
- Joint meetings of teachers and working life representatives (at supervised work training places).

Conclusion

It would be presumptuous of me, on the strength of the study presented here, to pronounce categorically on the function performed by special schools for the mentally retarded in Swedish society. Instead, therefore, allow me to express my confidence in these schools and their potential function. One potential function of this kind could be the promotion in every way of the pupils' abilities and skills, so that, in addition to finding their school career worth while, they will be able to respond to the demands of adult life with a realistic belief in their ability and skills. School must also prepare them for life in such a way that they will not need to "stand there cap in hand" and be accepted on sufferance by the community outside school. Schools for the mentally retarded must not in any way get bogged down in a role implying "training for submission". Instead the pupils must be allowed to feel that they are citizens like anybody else, with the same rights and - according to their capacity - the same obligations as other members of the community.

The interested reader is referred to reports emanating from the project (see appendix) and to the two reports now in preparation on the teaching process and a summary of the project (= final report), to be published by the Malmö School of Education during the autumn of 1989.

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APPENDIX

MATERIAL PRODUCED WITHIN THE PROJECT (examples)

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Rosenqvist, J. Utvecklingsstörda har svårt få jobb utan lönebidrag. Social Forskning, 1988, 2 (3), 14-15.
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